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ARMS CONTROL

Afghanistan and the deterioration in US-Soviet relations have obviously not invalidated the fundamental and persuasive reason for our pursuing arms control agreements with the Soviet Union -- the need for effective, equitable, and verifiable arms constraints which complement our own defense efforts, and thereby, enhance our security. Of the various cooperative dimensions of the US-Soviet relationship, arms control is the most essential to maintain because it serves the fundamental self-interest of the US. At the same time, recent Soviet actions, in particular the invasion of Afghanistan, have, as a practical matter, adversely affected the political context for negotiations and have made any progress difficult.

Since Afghanistan, we have had MBFR, CTB, and CW sessions with the Soviets, and we have participated in the multilateral Committee on Disarmament and the Biological Weapons Review Conference; and the SALT Standing Consultative Commission met (as required by the ABM Treaty) in March-April. We are now preparing for the NPT Review Conference in August and the Madrid CSCE meeting in November. In terms of deciding whether to reinvigorate the anti-satellite arms talks, time counts -- since the "technological window" is closing quickly.

In those negotiating sessions held since Afghanistan, the Soviets have been businesslike, although there has been no major substantive progress. At the same time, outside the negotiations, the Soviets have launched a "peace offensive" in an effort to deflect attention from Afghanistan and shift the burden on the US for lack of progress -- accusing us of "playing politics" with arms control.

We have found that our Allies also recognize the realities of the post-Afghanistan state of East-West relations as they affect arms control. Yet, as evidenced in their receptivity to the French proposal for a Conference on Disarmament in Europe and in their anxiety to press the Long Range Theater Nuclear Forces (LRTNF) arms control issue, they are somewhat more inclined than we are to move ahead at this time. This, presumably, is in part a reflection of their desire to preserve their special relationships with the East.

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As a group, the Third World countries are concerned that arms control is apparently going nowhere this year. This concern is certain to be expressed at the NPT Review Conference this summer. At the same time, Third World countries have made known in arms control fora their unhappiness with the Soviets over Afghanistan and their distaste for fake Soviet "peace offensives" designed to deflect attention from the invasion and the continuing conflict. To a degree, then, the Third World has been more sympathetic to us in arms control fora than in the past.

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